

Understanding Executive Functioning at Home

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Dynamic Interventions

Executive Functioning at Home

- Understand what executive functions are and how they affect daily living
- Understand the impact of executive functions at home and in the classroom
- Learn how to support students with self regulation
- Strategies for supporting executive functions, organization and homework

What are Executive Functions?

- “An umbrella term encompassing those interrelated skills necessary for purposeful, goal directed activity.” (Anderson, 1988)
- “Capacities that enable a person to engage in independent, purposeful, self-serving behaviors.” (Lezak, 1993)
- Executive Functions exist in the Prefrontal Cortex, the last part of the brain to develop, not fully maturing until age 24-26
 - EF is impacted by disabilities such as ADHD, Anxiety, Autism and Depression



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What are Executive Functions

- Initiate: begin task, activity, attention
- Working Memory: hold information actively in the mind
- Inhibit: stop an action or not react to an impulse
- Shift: move from one task or situation to another
- Plan: anticipate future events and develop steps to manage
- Organize: establish, maintain order
- Self-Monitor: attend to and revise behavior/output
- Emotional Control: regulating emotional responses

What “Good” Executive Functions Look Like



- Purposeful, goal-directed activity
- Active problem solving
- Self-control
- Independence
- Reliability and consistency
- Positive self-efficacy
- Internal locus of control

What Executive Dysfunction Looks Like at School and Home

- Initiate
 - Trouble starting chores
 - Couch potato
 - Relies on others to structure time, tasks
- Working Memory
 - Cannot remember multi-step instructions
- Inhibit:
 - Blurts out
 - Acts quickly without regard to consequences
 - Distracted, sidetracked
- Shift:
 - Stuck on a topic or activity
 - Poor flexibility
 - Resists change in routine

What Executive Dysfunction Looks Like at School and Home

- Plan:
 - Does assignments or chores at the last minute
 - Underestimates time needed to complete a task
- Organize:
 - Lacks a strategy to complete work
 - Not a leader with peers
 - Messy
 - Homework is poorly organized
- Self-Monitor
 - Unaware of impact of own behavior
 - Makes careless errors
 - Does not check work
- Emotional Control
 - Easily upset by “typical” social interactions
 - Difficult to soothe
 - Takes a long time to recover, lacks resiliency

What is a Parent to Do??



Supporting Emotional Regulation

- The mind and body work to maintain a state of regulation
- Executive Dysfunction impacts a student's ability to achieve this state, often resulting in emotional responses to typical situations
- Lack of coping skills
- Lack of resiliency
- Lack of ability to adapt
- Low frustration tolerance
- Low self-esteem and self-concept



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Supporting Emotional Regulation



- Coping Skills
 - Essential for emotional regulation
 - Deep breathing
 - Muscle relaxation
 - Visualization
 - Mindfulness
 - Time away/breaks
 - Walks
 - Listening to music
 - Reading
 - Anything that is positive and will help to manage stress

Supporting Emotional Regulation

- Emotional Regulation Charts
 - First step in independent regulation
 - Quantifies emotional escalation
 - Can use a 3- or 5-point scale
 - Allow student to define the feeling and give an example of when that feeling occurs
 - Pair coping skills with each level of escalation
 - Requires practice and buy in from the student to be successful



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Supporting Emotional Regulation



- When talking about Emotional Regulation, validate the feeling.
 - “I know you are feeling angry/sad/hyper right now. How can I help?”
- Focus on the problem instead of the child
 - Use person first language
- Your child did not choose to have emotional dysregulation, they would rather feel more in control of themselves and their feelings

Supporting Organization and Homework

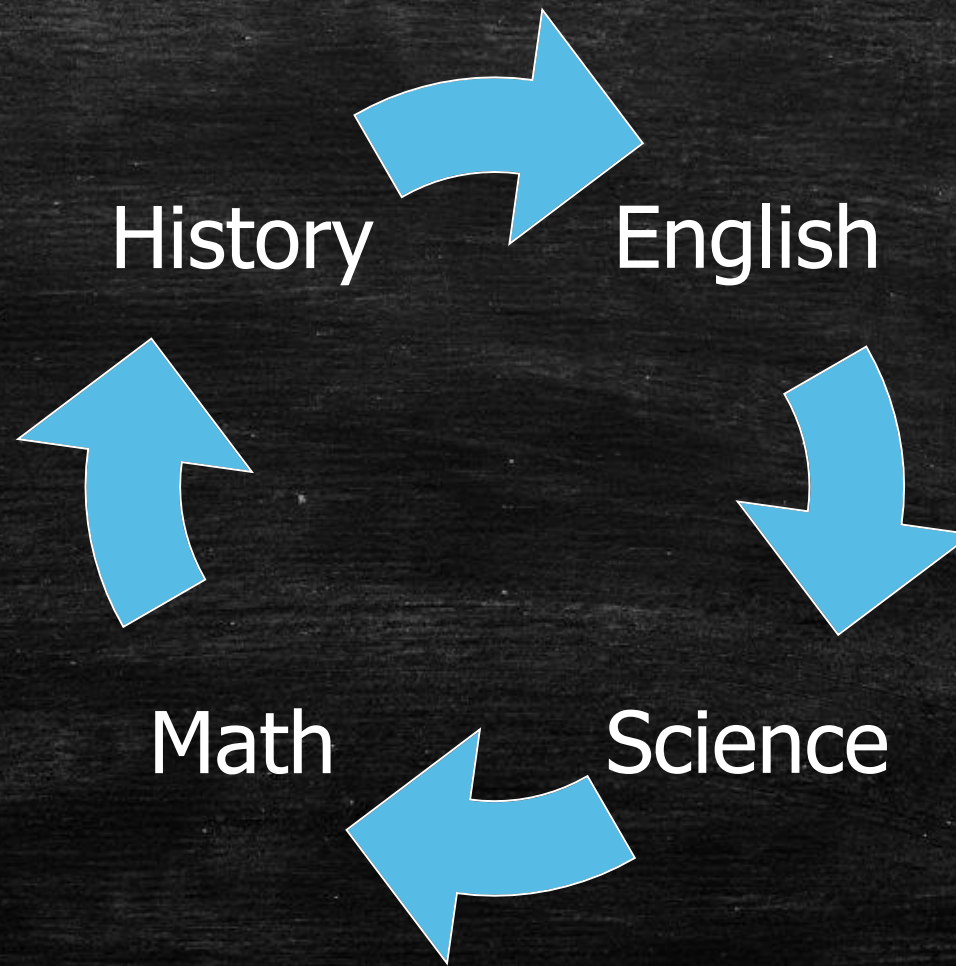
- Backpack Organization
 - To reduce clutter in backpacks, have these essentials along with additional items that the teacher requires
 - 1 Assignment notebook
 - 1 Binder
 - 3 Pens (black, blue and red)
 - 1 Folder for each class period/subject
 - 2 Pencils

Supporting Organization and Homework

- Creating the Home Office
- Having a dedicated place at home for schoolwork will show your student that school is important and should be taken seriously. The following are some essentials that will help your student maximize their study skills.
 - 1 Desk/Table
 - 1 Calculator (avoid using a phone, that could cause distraction)
 - 1 Set of colored pencils
 - 1 Ruler
 - Lined and graph paper
 - Pens and pencils
 - Music (optional, it works for some, but not for all)
 - Computer (for work, not gaming)

Supporting Organization and Homework

- The Homework Wheel



Supporting Organization and Homework

- The Homework Wheel
- Adding structure and organization to a student's homework schedule, in essence mimicking the school day can help to improve efficiency and productivity
- Following some simple steps and strategies consistently can lessen the amount of “time” that is spent doing homework
- The amount of work is not changed, but instead, idle, unproductive time will be minimized

Supporting Organization and Homework

- The Homework Wheel
- Have your student rank his/her school subjects in order of favorite to least favorite. (i.e. Math, English, Science, History, PE, etc.)
- Determine how long your student can sustain focused attention without needing a break (i.e., 10 minutes, 15 minutes, 20 minutes)
- Setting your student up in their study area, have them start with their favorite subject (or least favorite subject), working for the predetermined number of minutes
- After the time has ended, allow them to get up, stretch their legs, get a drink of water, etc. for 3-5 minutes

Supporting Organization and Homework

- The Homework Wheel
- Whether they have finished the first subject or not, have them put that subject away and start on the next subject for the predetermined time
- After the time is up, allow the short break, then start on the next subject
- Repeat this cycle for all subjects. If there is no homework in a certain subject that day, have them read a book for pleasure
- Once all the subjects have been cycled through, begin the wheel again with the first subject, finishing what was not completed during the first cycle

Supporting Organization and Homework

- The Homework Wheel
- Allow your student to choose the order in which each subject is completed
- Make a visual representation of the Homework Wheel, post it in the study area and in the kitchen, or wherever your family posts items of importance
- Use a reliable timer to keep your student on track
 - An alarm clock, stopwatch, or oven/microwave timer should work well
- Be consistent. Help manage the structure of the Homework Wheel. Over time it will become routine, and monitoring should lessen

Supporting Organization and Homework

- The Homework Wheel
- Adjust the amount of time that a student spends working on each subject if needed
 - If you start with 20 minutes, and notice your student losing focus after 15 minutes, change it to 15 minutes
- Gradually increase the time your student works on each subject
 - Add 1 minute per week to each work session
- Keep track over the course of a few weeks to see if this increases efficiency. Students should be able to complete homework earlier each night, assuming that the amount of work remains consistent or gradually increases over the course of the year

Improving Communication



- Parents Are From Earth, Students Are From Mars
 - Learn To Speak Martian!
 - Engage in conversation, ask open-ended questions
 - Be prepared for answers such as “fine” and “nothing”
 - Use “Tell me about....” instead of “How was...”
 - Take an interest in their activities/lives
 - Don't try to be “cool” - instead, be yourself
 - You are probably cool enough already



Supporting Executive Functions at Home and in the Community

- Research indicates that running improved 8-12 year olds' cognitive flexibility and creativity
- 2 hours of fitness training improved the working memory in 7-9 year olds
- Martial Arts training (with mindfulness) is associated with improved attention, generalized to tests and the classroom



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Case Conferencing

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